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TAGS: [EAID](#) [OEXC](#) [OIIP](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [SMIG](#) [EINV](#) [AM](#)
SUBJECT: EXPERIENCE ENGAGING DIASPORA COMMUNITIES - ARMENIA

REF: A. STATE 86401
[1](#)B. 04 STATE 1255

Classified By: Ambassador Marie L. Yovanovitch. Reasons 1.4(b & d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. The Armenian Diaspora is a well organized and well financed community within the United States. They have moved beyond their original purpose of maintaining their Armenian identity and giving a political voice to the various communities, to providing humanitarian aid, development assistance, and technical advice to encourage the economic growth of Armenia. Post has long recognized the importance of engaging the Armenian-American community and has opened its doors and actively sought to strengthen ties with the Diaspora to better coordinate assistance activities. Post hosts Diaspora Roundtables in Armenia to learn of Diasporan activities, and Ambassadors travel to Armenian-American communities in New York, Massachusetts, Michigan and California to explain USG-assistance programs and USG policy in Armenia. Post also makes public outreach material on assistance successes available to all, including the Diaspora. Post though is always seeking new avenues of approach to the Diaspora to encourage even more involvement in assistance and as a means of disseminating its message.
END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) Below are post's answers to Reftel A questions.

[1](#)A. Armenians are an Identifiable Community and Very Well Organized

[1](#)3. (C) Armenians began leaving their traditional homeland on the Armenian Plateau (i.e. eastern Turkey, northwestern Iran, and the current country of Armenia) in the eleventh century and have yet to stop. Invasions, deportations, mass migrations, and massacres have all pushed Armenians to seek safety in Europe, Russia, the Middle East, India, and, eventually, the United States. Worldwide, the Armenian population is estimated at 10 million people. Approximately three million are believed to live in Armenia, and the rest are scattered throughout the world, with the largest Armenian populations in Russia, the United States, and Lebanon. Armenian communities are found in almost every country in Europe, the countries of the previous Soviet Union, South America, and throughout Africa. The GOAM Ministry of Foreign Affairs estimates the Armenian Diaspora population in the United States at 1.5 million, with the majority living in Southern California, New York, and Boston.

[1](#)4. (C) Maintenance of Armenian identity plays a very important role in the Armenian Diaspora and through the centuries Armenians have maintained that identity and sustained their communities through the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Armenian language, fraternal and charitable organizations, and widespread publishing of Armenian texts including newspapers and books.

15. (C) The Armenian-American community, which this cable will focus on, can be organized around sets of affiliated organizations: the Armenian Apostolic Church which in the United States is divided between the Armenian Church of America (also known as the Diocese) and the Prelacy, the Armenian Catholic Community, the Armenian Protestant Community, the ARF/Dashnak Community, Armenian General Benevolent Union Community, Hnchag Community, and independent institutions. While these organizations could serve as platforms for outreach, many have their own political agenda (whether expressed or not) or connections to political parties and/or politicians in Armenia that may conflict with USG foreign policy goals in Armenia.

16. (C) The Armenian Apostolic Church, also known in the U.S. as the Armenian Church of America, is divided into a Eastern Diocese, based in New York City, and the Western Diocese, based in Los Angeles. The Armenian Church is under the authority of the Holy See of Etchmiadzin in Armenia and so directly linked with the predominant religious organization of Armenia. The two dioceses provide monetary support to the charitable organizations run by the Armenian Apostolic Church which operates schools, community centers, soup kitchens, and other activities for the youth and elderly. The Eastern Diocese organized The Fund for Armenian Relief (FAR) after the devastating Armenian earthquake of 1988 to deliver food and medical supplies, and continues to operate numerous humanitarian assistance projects in Armenia.

17. (C) The Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church recognizes the jurisdictional authority of the Armenian

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Catholicos (head of the Armenian church) based in Antelias, Lebanon. This is only for administrative purposes though, as, doctrinally, the Prelacy recognizes the theological supremacy of the Catholicos in Etchmiadzin in Armenia. The Prelacy is associated with the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF)/Dashnaks, founded in 1890, and constitute one of the three largest sectors of the Armenian-American Community and are considered conservative in nature. (NOTE: The term "Dashnak" in the United States is a generic term to apply to any supporter, while in Armenia it applies to a member of the Dashnak political party. END NOTE) The ARF/Dashnaks have two goals: recognition that the massacres of Armenians in Turkey in 1915 constitute genocide, and the recovery of the traditional Armenian lands in eastern Turkey. It also supports a ladies auxiliary association of the ARF known as the Armenian Relief Society (ARS), in addition to youth and cultural associations and a large media operation in the United States including newspapers, radio, and television.

18. (C) The Armenian Catholics are the smallest religious denomination in the Armenian community and the lead institution is the Eparchy based in New York. The Armenian Catholic Church supports a small number of schools and orphanages but has almost no activities in Armenia.

19. (C) In comparison, the Armenian Protestant Community is considered the oldest Armenian community in the United States and is very active through their Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA). This organization supports 140 different mission and service projects in 22 countries around the world. In Armenia, the AMAA provides support to orphanages, nurseries, children's hospitals, and schools. They also staff health and dental clinics, provide relief to needy families, and give scholarships to students.

110. (C) The Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), established in 1906, is the second major sector and is the largest charitable organization in the Armenian Community. AGBU seeks to preserve and promote the Armenian identity and heritage through educational, cultural, and humanitarian programs. They are affiliated with the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party (ADL), also known as Ramkavars, which is active

(but marginal) in Armenia, the American Diaspora community, and in the Middle East, such as Lebanon. In Armenia, AGBU supplies funding for the Armenian Apostolic Church including a seminary, the American University of Armenia, medical centers, and the Armenian Virtual College which provides on-line classes to Armenians around the world on Armenian language, history, and culture. They offer programs for youth of all ages that encourage the youth of the Diaspora from every country to visit Armenia. These programs range from Scout Camps for the youngest, to Discover Armenia trips for high school students, to internships for college students. They also publish their own journals and a newspaper.

¶11. (C) The Hnchag, or Armenian Social Democrat Party, is the third of the politically based Armenian community cluster of organizations and the smallest Armenian-community based political party. It functions as a political club in California and publishes a weekly paper.

¶12. (C) In the last 30 years, members of the Armenian-American community have formed a number of independent organizations that are non-partisan in character and address contemporary issues and problems. These independent institutions form the third major sector in the Armenian-American community. Many of these organizations are composed of professionals and function only in the United States. These organizations include lobbying groups such as the Armenian Assembly of America (AAA), a non-profit organization promoting awareness of Armenian issues; the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA), which seeks to influence and guide U.S. policy on matters related to Armenia and is generally recognized as the lobbying organization of the Dashnaks; and the newly formed U.S.- Armenia Public Affairs Committee (USAPAC). There are professional organizations such as the Armenian Bar Association; Armenian Medical Association; and Chairs of Armenian Studies that fund centers in various American universities. There are also private charitable organizations such as the Lincy Foundation, the Cafesjian Family Foundation, the Tufenkian Foundation and others who provide aid for development projects and for people in need.

¶B. Armenian-American Community Has A Strong Connection to Armenia

¶13. (C) As detailed in the description of the Diaspora

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organizations in paragraphs 5 to 12, the Armenian-American community maintains strong ties to Armenia in almost every area of endeavor. While much of the Armenian-American Diaspora work in Armenia previously focused on humanitarian or charitable projects, new connections are being formed in the areas of assistance that claim to promote economic development, strengthening institutions and civil society, and advocating for an independent media. Private-public partnerships are becoming more common as non-government organizations in Armenia learn to tap both the USG foreign assistance funds and the Armenian Diaspora organizations to finance their projects. Examples include AGBU providing additional money to a group of young farmers that also receives funding from the United States Department of Agriculture, and FAR implementing a water development project financed by USAID.

¶14. (C) Members of the Armenian Diaspora have returned to Armenia since independence in 1991 and have served at almost all levels of the Armenian government, including both the executive and legislative branch. Other members of the Diaspora have returned to run local businesses or as representatives of international businesses wishing to establish a foothold in Armenia. Professionals, such as priests, professors, and lawyers, have also returned to contribute their skills for a year or longer to develop the

country.

¶15. (C) Remittances are a vital element of the Armenian economy and comprise approximately 15 percent of Armenia's GDP. In 2008, Armenians overseas sent over USD 2.5 billion to Armenia. However, approximately 80 percent of those funds came from Armenians temporarily working in Russia who cannot be considered as part of the Diaspora. Much of the remaining 20 percent, USD 500 million, came from the Armenia Diaspora community in the United States.

¶C. Activation of the Diaspora Community for Humanitarian Relief

¶16. (C) On December 7, 1988, an earthquake struck the northern region of Armenia, killing over 25,000 persons and destroying Armenia's second largest town. Local officials could not provide sufficient relief and the Soviet government allowed in foreign aid workers. The Archbishop of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church, based in New York, along with respected members of the Armenian Diaspora in the United States, formed the Fund for Armenian Relief to deliver relief supplies to the wounded and homeless. FAR continued to operate a food aid program even after independence in 1991 and served as the U.S. Department of Agriculture's organization of choice for distribution of food supplies. Since 1988, FAR has channeled over USD 265 million in humanitarian assistance to Armenia. The lobbying group AAA also established its office in Armenia at this time and advocated in the U.S. for support for the earthquake's victims.

¶17. (C) The Department of State's Humanitarian Program "Operation Provide Hope" began in 1992 and has flown 109 airlifts to Armenia, delivering over 2,500 containers of humanitarian aid. These containers are full of medical supplies, clothing, bedding, and other necessities donated by private volunteer groups, including those of the Armenian Diaspora. Some of the containers are distributed to needy families by NGOs, while others are stored in warehouses to be used in case of another natural disaster. These deliveries continue today with the help from the Lincy Foundation. Also, in March 1992, the GOAM, by Presidential Decree, created the Hayastan All Armenian Fund to collect contributions from Armenian communities worldwide and channel those funds to the reconstruction and economic projects in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Under the fund's charter, the President of Armenia serves as the ex-officio President of the Board of Trustees and other government officials serve on the Board. Affiliate offices of the fund exist today in Los Angeles, New York, and in third countries where there is a concentration of Armenians. Annual telethons are held to raise money for the organization.

D, and E. Diaspora Engagement in Long-Term Investment and Institution Building

¶18. (C) Although no structured mechanism exists for Diaspora involvement in Armenia's economic development plans, a number of Diaspora organizations and individual Armenian-American's

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have invested in Armenia with the goal of developing the economy. Among the most significant is the Lincy Foundation, a non-profit organization established by Kirk Kerkorian, an Armenian-American, which has donated over USD 300 million in the past ten years. These funds were used for major infrastructure repair, earthquake zone recovery, renovation of schools and other buildings, and lending to small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Armenian-Americans have purchased stakes in local companies or businesses in the areas of manufacturing, banking, high technology and tourism. Members

of the Diaspora have also served as facilitators to assist multi-national corporations in developing their presence in Armenia, and as experts on markets and investment funding. The National Competitiveness Foundation of Armenia is an independent organization founded through a partnership between the GOAM and businesspeople from the United States, Russia, the European Union and the Middle East. It works with businesses, investors, Ministries and development agencies to develop public-private partnership projects aimed at achieving strategic objectives towards national competitiveness. The Foundation is headed by the Armenian Prime Minister and includes the Ministers of Economy and Foreign Affairs along with other government officials and businesspeople from the private sector on its Board.

119. (C) The Diaspora is engaged in a much smaller number of initiatives in scientific or educational institution building. AGBU and private Armenian-Americans are heavily invested in the development of the American University of Armenia and are promoting the university both as an American-style education institution that teaches American cultural values to Armenian students, and as an option for Diaspora graduate students either for an advanced degree or a "year abroad" program. On the scientific side, Armenian-American owned engineering and IT companies outsource software development and other R&D issues to local Armenian companies. The GOAM is very interested in developing the IT industry in Armenia and sent representatives to the ArmTech Congress in San Jose, California this year to meet with American IT companies and representatives of the Diaspora communities to attract investment in Armenian IT and encourage high tech companies to locate their offices and factories in Armenia.

1F. Conflict Resolution is a not a Priority with the Diaspora

120. (C) The Armenian Diaspora has attempted to influence the GOAM's foreign policy since independence. Two previous GOAM Foreign Ministers were members of the Diaspora: one was an Armenian-American, and the other was born in Syria but studied in the U.S. and participated in the Diaspora community. The Armenian-American Diaspora, although primarily grouped around different political, religious, and social agendas, tend to be nationalistic in nature. The groups pay close attention to the GOAM's foreign policy decisions and are quick to mobilize their supporters against the GOAM if the Diaspora groups believe the GOAM is not acting in Armenia's best interests. Many group oppose the GOAM's regional reconciliation efforts on the grounds that such reconciliation does not include resolution of the simmering conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh or recognition that the Ottoman Empire engaged in genocide in 1915. Other groups though, such as AAA and AGBU, have publicly supported the GOAM's policies of regional cooperation and an end to Armenia's isolation in the Caucasus. In September, AAA, AGBU, the Eastern and Western Diocese Churches, and the Ramkavars issues a public statement supporting President Sargsian's foreign policy to normalize relations with Turkey.

1G. Diaspora Organizations Try to Meet Needs of the People

121. (C) Quite a number of the Diaspora organizations described above conduct social programs in Armenia. The AGBU, the Fund for Armenian Relief, the Children of Armenia Fund, and the Jinishian Foundation are all engaged in delivering assistance to vulnerable populations, especially in the education sector in the rural areas. These organizations fund school renovation and construction, teacher training, school equipment, and provide scholarships for students to continue their studies either in Armenian or abroad. The organizations also fund orphanages and provide basic items such as clothing and food to those institutions. Other organizations have more defined goals, such as the Armenia Tree Project which provides economic support to rural areas through its

reforestation and other environmental programs, and the Armenian Eyecare Project which supports eye clinics, a mobile

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eye medical center, and medical education and training in Armenia.

¶22. (C) In the health care sector, members of the Diaspora community and Armenian health care professionals have established professional networks and have cooperated since independence. Diaspora organizations fund the construction of health clinics in addition to providing medical equipment and clinical training programs to local health care providers. Armenian-American doctors and other health care professionals travel to Armenia on their own and contribute their time and expertise to the treatment of Armenians. Diaspora groups have provided significant support to medical centers specializing in eye-care, cardiac surgery and women's health.

¶H. Little Interest in Democracy Promotion

¶23. (C) The Diaspora Community has shown limited interest in the promotion of democracy, electoral reform, and civil society development in Armenia. No Diaspora group funds non-partisan NGOs engaged in those areas. Individual Armenian-Americans, however, provide financial support to Armenian policy think tanks such as the Armenian Center for National and International Studies which focuses on foreign and public policy issues. The Civilitas Foundation, founded by former Foreign Minister Vardan Oskanian, and which focuses on leveraging international resources in the areas of education, media, rural development, and environmental awareness receives individual support from the Diaspora community. Two U.S.- based foundations, the Kanach Foundation, which supports environmental protection, and the Tufenkian Foundation, which claims to support human rights, consumer protection and arts projects, are also supported by individual contributions.

¶24. (C) Opportunities do exist for the Diaspora Community to support democracy promotion and electoral reform if they so desire. Numerous NGOs in Armenia, such as It's Your Choice and the Freedom on Information Center of Armenia, could use the financial support and backing of Diaspora organizations. In the area of civil society development, the Diaspora organizations could provide for the continued sustainability of numerous USAID-supported projects, including the eleven anti-corruption centers, Association of Legal Clinics, and the three regional Intermediary Service Organizations that provide support to local NGOs. There is great potential for collaboration between the USG and Diaspora organizations in the area of civil society development.

¶I. GOAM is Dedicated to Developing Relationship with Diaspora

¶25. (C) The GOAM has long recognized the importance of a strong relationship with the Armenian Diaspora. Previous administrations utilized a Diaspora Relations Department within the Foreign Ministry, but in June 2008, current President Serzh Sargsian created a separate Ministry of Diaspora. Its publicly stated purposes are (1) Preservation of Armenian identity in all its forms; (2) Utilization of the Diaspora to empower the homeland and bring about progress; and (3) Repatriation. The Ministry began work in October 2008 and intends to make itself the liaison between Diaspora organizations and the GOAM as well as the coordinator of Diaspora assistance and development projects. The Ministry is trying to develop links to all the Armenian Diaspora communities in the world, and has held conferences, such as a recent one for lawyers, to bring Diaspora professionals to Armenia to discuss strategies for developing Armenia. The Ministry has a number of broad goals to entice more Diasporan

involvement in Armenia and to encourage members of the Diaspora to return and invest in Armenia, preferably permanently. As the Ministry has been active for only a year, they are still defining their strategies to fulfill their stated purposes. Post will continue to follow the development of the Ministry and their engagement with the Diaspora Community in the U.S.

J. Post is Actively Engaged in Outreach Efforts to the Diaspora Community

¶26. (C) Post has actively engaged with the Diaspora through Ambassador-led Diaspora Roundtables and Ambassador trips to Diaspora communities in the United States. The goals of these outreach efforts are to improve communication between the mission and the Armenian-American community about USG

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assistance in Armenia, possible public/private partnerships for development projects and coordination of assistance efforts. Previous Ambassadors visited Armenian-American communities in New York, Massachusetts, California, and other states. In the past, the U.S. OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs would travel to local communities and brief on the Nagorno-Karabakh negotiations.

¶27. (C) Ambassador Yovanovitch revived that tradition and conducted her own trip to those communities in June. During those trips, the Ambassador met with private charities, religious organizations, businessmen, and professional associations. The meetings and events were organized by local Armenian-Americans who also opened their homes to her for receptions and other social events that allowed the Ambassador to meet the leaders and influential members of the Armenian-American communities. The Ambassador answered many questions regarding USG policy in Armenia, foreign assistance funding and programs, and the business environment in Armenia. Her impression was that the Armenian-American community is always looking to do more in Armenia and that a large pool of resources, both financial and professional, can be tapped to complement the ongoing USG assistance programs.

¶28. (C) Post has also hosted Diaspora Roundtables when Armenian-Americans who are in Armenia are invited to participate in discussions with representatives from Post and USAID on USG foreign assistance programs. As with the Ambassador tours, the Roundtables seek to improve communication between Post and the Diaspora community and to exchange information on their respective development and assistance programs. Roundtables have been held for a number of years and Post is planning to host similar roundtables in the summer of 2010, when many Armenian-Americans will travel to Armenia. Post has also held roundtables for Diaspora NGOs to discuss possible cooperation on foreign assistance projects with USAID, and meetings with individual Armenian-Americans to strengthen ties to the Diaspora and hear their views on the U.S.- Armenia relationship. Post found the roundtables an effective means of disseminating information on USG assistance in Armenia and promoting USG goals for Armenia.

K. Unsolicited Requests from Diaspora

¶29. (C) Post receives 10 to 15 unsolicited requests each month from Diaspora groups and local NGOs for financial or material assistance for their programs. Post's Assistance Coordination Group meets bi-weekly and, as part of its regular agenda, reviews the requests for assistance and responds to each one. Many of the requests are directed to one of the implementing partners for either Humanitarian Assistance or Democracy Commission grants for further assistance. The requests for equipment, the most common being

for computers, are retained and later reviewed when Post has excess equipment available. This is another area of possible collaboration and Post is actively pursuing ideas for public-private alliances between USAID and the Diaspora requestors. In addition to the unsolicited requests, Post funds a number of Diaspora groups through the Humanitarian Assistance funding and other programs.

L. Public Diplomacy Programs

¶30. (C) Previously, Post created English language videos, newsletters and posters describing the extent of USG assistance in Armenia for the Diaspora audience. The loss of funding ended those activities in 2006. Post is wary of targeting the Armenian-American community with information on USG activities and assistance efforts in Armenia due to possible violation of the Smith-Mundt Act of 1948 which prohibits the USG from disseminating within the United States any information about the United States and its policies prepared for dissemination abroad. However, Post does prepare a newsletter on its assistance programs and maintains a website detailing successes that are available to public and so also to the Diaspora Community if they desire to seek out that information.

M. Planning Future Programs

¶31. (C) The GOAM's newly formed Ministry of Diaspora Affairs and the National Competitiveness Foundation of Armenia (NCFA) are both grappling with how to create information systems to

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promote stronger links with the Pan Armenian world, particularly in the United States, Russia, France and Lebanon. Given the large and varied Armenian Diaspora community in the United States, it is difficult to imagine that the Department of State's global information system would be sufficiently granulated to reflect Armenian Diaspora organizations and individuals unless its system was created in active collaboration with the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs and the NCFA. However, the Department is well-positioned to disseminate information about strategic, cutting-edge or innovative initiatives worldwide in the field of diaspora engagement, and possibly provide TDY support in the field designing and implementing such programs. Embassy Yerevan would be interested in best practices of information systems and outreach approaches of other governments with diaspora communities such as Ireland, China, India, Chile, Mexico and Israel.

¶32. (U) Post's Point of Contact is Charles Lobdell at LobdellCA2@state.gov or IVG 996-4697.
YOVANOVITCH